

Recommendations to Reduce the Risk of Disease Transmission From Animals to Humans at Petting Zoos, Fairs and Other Animal Exhibits

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Background

Infectious disease agents, which can cause illness in humans, may be carried by many types of animals including pets (dogs, cats, birds, reptiles and exotic species), livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, chickens), and wildlife (bats, skunks, raccoons, rabbits). The primary infectious agents of concern in a petting zoo setting include *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, *E. coli* O157:H7, *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*, which all may be passed in animal feces and transmitted to humans via direct or indirect fecal-oral contact. Animals with the infectious agents in their feces may or may not show signs of illness such as diarrhea. Direct fecal-oral transmission may occur when animals are petted or touched. Indirect fecal-oral transmission can occur if fecal contamination of foods, water or surfaces (fencing, ground) occurs.

Why is There a Need for Recommendations?

Human illness outbreaks have been linked to visiting petting zoos or similar settings where animal contact occurs in Washington State, Pennsylvania, Canada and the United Kingdom. In addition, single human cases and illness outbreaks have occurred in Washington State that were linked to livestock kept on family farms or property.

It appears the number of petting zoos is increasing in Washington. This increases the risk of human illness as more people, most likely children, visit a farm and have contact with farm animals. Large numbers of children visiting a petting zoo with animals that are passing infectious agents in their feces could result in numerous human illnesses if preventive measures are not followed.

Several measures, which are covered in detail in later sections, can be taken to reduce the risk of human illness resulting from animal contact. *Persons or organizations that operate or visit petting zoos, fairs or other animal exhibits need to be aware of recommended disease prevention measures.*

Are Petting Zoos Regulated or Inspected by any Local, State or Federal Agency?

In Washington most local health departments have worked with fairs in their counties to assure hand washing facilities and hand washing signs are placed near the petting zoos and animal exhibits. There are no state or federal laws that cover public health issues related to petting zoos.

Persons exhibiting farm animals for non-agricultural purposes (such as petting zoos) must be licensed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Inspection Service, Animal Welfare under the Animal Welfare Act. This is to assure animals are provided humane care, but not to protect human health. To contact USDA about licensing requirements for a petting zoo call (916) 857-6205.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR PETTING ZOO OPERATORS: AT FAIRS, FAMILY FARMS, OR ANY LIVESTOCK EXHIBITION

Provide Information to Your Visitors

Post signs in several locations including the beginning of the tour, places where the animals are located, and the eating area. Include the following messages:

- Wash hands with soap and water after touching the animals
- Wash hands with soap and water before eating
- Avoid touching your face or mouth before washing your hands
- Do not eat or drink while in the animal area
- List animals that are off limits and should not be touched

Point out the signs to the visitors and go over each point, emphasizing hand washing, before starting the tour.

Hand Washing

Provide sufficient hand washing stations with running water, soap, and disposable towels in convenient locations. Route visitors directly to the hand washing stations after leaving an animal area, and before entering the eating area.

- Hand washing facilities should be convenient for use by children and adults
- Maintain hand washing stations in a sanitary condition and keep soap and towel dispensers stocked
- Encourage employees/staff to use the hand washing facilities and demonstrate to visitors how to wash hands properly

For information about hand washing facilities, contact the local health department in your county.

Cleaning and Disinfection

- Remove and dispose of animal manure appropriately (several times a day)
- Replace animal bedding daily
- Clean visible fecal material from any surface with soap and water as soon as possible
- Clean fencing and rails daily with soap and water or when grossly contaminated with feces
- Disinfect fencing and rails after cleaning (1 part bleach/10 parts water solution or Lysol following container directions)

Animals

- Calves, other young ruminants (sheep, goats), and young poultry present a greater risk of transmitting infections to humans than other animals
- Do not display ill animals or those known to be positive for infectious agents
- Prevent contact with manure, water troughs and animals that should not be touched by providing barriers and controlling access to areas where visitors should not go

Adult Supervision

- Require adequate adult supervision from your visitors or provide trained staff for each group of visitors
- Remind your adult visitors of these recommendations

Eating

- Locate eating areas away from animal areas
- Exclude all animals from eating areas
- Keep eating areas clean
- Provide only an approved water source for drinking water
- Do not serve unpasteurized milk or milk products to visitors

If you provide or prepare food items for visitors, contact your local health department for information about safe food preparation and handling.

**RECOMMENDED PRACTICES FOR PERSONS WHO VISIT PETTING ZOOS:
GENERAL PUBLIC, TEACHERS OR ADULTS WITH SCHOOL,
PRESCHOOL, OR DAYCARE GROUPS**

Prior to the Visit

- Discuss any requirements with the petting zoo operator
- Visit the site before the group visit
- Go over the rules that must be followed with children and adults
- A sufficient number of adults should be available to supervise the children
- Some persons, including children < 5 years of age, the elderly, pregnant women, and the immunocompromised (e.g., those with HIV/AIDS), have a higher risk of serious infections caused by disease agents carried by farm animals. These persons or their parents should be made aware of this increased risk before the visit.

Emphasize Personal Hygiene Practices Including

- Wash hands after touching the animals
- Wash hands before eating
- Do not touch your face or mouth before washing your hands
- Do not touch animals that should not be touched
- Do not eat or drink while in the animal area
- Toys and pacifiers should not be used in the animal area
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk or milk products

During the Visit

- Read and follow directions on posted signs
- Remind children of the rules
- Provide adult supervision of children washing their hands to make sure it occurs

If you have questions or comments about these recommendations please contact your local health department or the Washington Department of Health at (360) 236-3362 or send them via email to john.grendon@doh.wa.gov